United Nations A/51/850

General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 April 1997

Original: English

Fifty-first session
Agenda item 138

Financing of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the reports of the Secretary-General (A/51/784 and Add.1), which contain the performance reports for the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) for the periods from 17 June to 15 December 1995 and from 16 December 1995 to 30 June 1996, respectively. The Advisory Committee also considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/781/Add.2) containing the proposed budget for the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) for the 12-month period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. During its consideration of the reports, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. UNMOT was established by the Security Council in its resolution 968 (1994) of 16 December 1994 for an initial period of six months. Its mandate has since then been extended by the Council in subsequent resolutions, the most recent being resolution 1089 (1996) of 13 December 1996, in which the Council extended the mandate of the Mission until 15 March 1997, subject to the proviso that the Agreement on a Temporary Ceasefire and the Cessation of Other Hostile Acts on the Tajik-Afghan Border and within the Country for the Duration of the Talks, signed at Tehran on 17 September 1994 (S/1994/1102, annex I), remain in force and that the parties demonstrate their commitment to an effective ceasefire, to national reconciliation and to the promotion of democracy.

3. As indicated in paragraph 14 of the report of the Secretary-General of 12 February 1997 (A/51/784/Add.2), total resources made available to the Mission from its inception until 30 June 1997 amount to $20,844,837 gross, subject to the extension of its mandate by the Security Council beyond 15 March 1997. Expenditures are estimated at $17,480,537 gross. Amounts totalling $17,538,994 have been assessed on Member States from inception of the Mission to 15 March 1997. In addition, the Advisory Committee was informed that as at 31 January 1997, contributions received totalled $14,841,960, leaving a shortfall of $2,697,034. Furthermore, cash balances stood at $6.1 million as at 15 February 1997.

4. Voluntary contributions received, as indicated in paragraphs 16 and 17 and annex VII of the same report, include $717,463 in cash from the Government of Germany and $70,537 in medical supplies from the Government of Switzerland. The trust fund established pursuant to Security Council resolution 968 (1994) to support the implementation of the Tehran Agreement and, in particular, the activities of the Joint Commission, has secured, to date, contributions totalling $82,224, consisting of $54,224 in cash from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and

97-08839 (E) 110497 140497

$28,000 in the form of a letter of credit from the United States of America.

Performance reports for the periods from 17 June to 15 December 1995 and from 16 December 1995 to 30 June 1996

5. The reports of the Secretary-General of 24 January and 11 February 1997 (A/51/784 and A/51/784/Add.1), contain information on the financial performance of UNMOT for the periods from 17 June to 15 December 1995 and from 16 December 1995 to 30 June 1996, respectively. The reports also outline the action to be taken by the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-first session in connection with the financing of UNMOT.

6. As indicated in paragraph 5 of both reports, total prorated resources made available to UNMOT for the entire period from 17 June 1995 to 30 June 1996 amount to $9,201,300 gross ($8,739,600 net). Expenditures amount to $6,341,100 gross ($6,076,000 net), leaving an unencumbered balance of $2,860,200 gross ($2,663,600 net).

7. Unliquidated obligations for the same entire period, according to the information in both reports, total $866,800. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that unliquidated obligations had been reduced to $510,500 as at 21 February 1997, the bulk of them relating to commercial communications, as a result of the slow billing and the processing required in relation to INMARSAT facilities.

8. Paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report of the Secretary-General of 24 January 1997 (A/51/784) indicate savings under the following budget line items for the period from 17 June to 15 December 1995, as a result of less rotation travel by military observers than that originally projected, a 7 per cent vacancy rate of international civilian staff and the non-use of helicopter services: military personnel costs ($196,900), civilian personnel costs ($479,600), premises/accommodation ($11,000), transport operations ($74,200), air operations ($596,300), communications ($36,400), public information programmes ($33,600) and staff assessment ($145,200).

9. With the exception of communications, the same budget line items as indicated in paragraph 8 above showed savings in the following reporting period (16 December 1995-30 June 1996): $292,900 in military personnel costs, $224,400 in civilian personnel costs, $17,600 in premises/accommodation, $49,000 in transport operations, $652,600 in air operations, $3,700 in supplies and services, $36,800 in public information programmes and $51,400 in staff assessment. This was due mostly to a lower than budgeted mission subsistence allowance for military observers and international staff, lower travel costs of military observers and the non-use of helicopter services. The net additional requirements of $14,100 under communications resulted from the additional requirement of $39,400 for reimbursement to the United Nations Peace Forces (UNPF) by UNMOT of the cost of freight of spare parts and supplies transferred from UNPF, offset in part by savings of $25,300 under commercial communications, as explained in paragraphs 31 to 33 of annex II to the report of the Secretary-General of 11 February 1997 (A/51/784/Add.1).

10. The Advisory Committee also notes savings of $184,100 under mission subsistence allowance for military observers and of $265,500 for international staff for the entire period covered by the two performance reports. Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that, in view of the hardship involved in the Mission, it had been difficult to fill all the authorized civilian staff positions with appropriate personnel. As to corrective actions taken by UNMOT, following the Office of Internal Oversight Services' finding of overpayment of mission subsistence allowance indicated in its report of 30 September 1996 (A/51/432, annex), the Committee was informed that an overpayment totalling $66,300 had been fully recovered to date. Furthermore, the Committee received, upon inquiry, the corrective actions taken by UNMOT to implement other recommendations of the Office.

11. In addition, the Committee was informed that the Mission had been audited by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in July 1995 and by the External Board of Auditors in September 1995. The Committee is of the view that the Mission would benefit more from better coordination and allocation of time between internal and external audit. The Committee was informed, however, that the next audit by the Office of Internal Oversight Services was planned for January 1998 and that the Board of Auditors was to travel to Tajikistan in March 1997, but that because of the security situation, travel plans had been postponed.

12. The Committee notes that voluntary contributions are not clearly presented in either of the performance reports. Only in paragraph 16, annex II, of the first report (A/51/784) and paragraph 18 of the second (A/51/784/Add.1), is it mentioned that the UNMOT headquarters in Dushanbe are provided by the Government of Tajikistan free of charge, under the status-of-mission agreement, while UNMOT bears the responsibility of maintaining the premises in suitable condition. Annex II, paragraph 29, and annex II, paragraph 33, of the respective reports mention the use of Turkish telephone lines at no additional cost to the Mission. The Committee was informed, upon inquiry, that this service had ceased in December 1995. The Committee believes that voluntary contributions could be better articulated within proposed budgets and performance reports in the future. Furthermore, the Committee recalls that the principle of full budgeting approved by the General Assembly in its resolutions 43/230 of 21 December 1988 and 44/192 B of 21 December 1989 is not consistently applied. The Committee intends to address this issue in a later report.

13. Moreover, the two performance reports do not provide a clear explanation for the over- or underexpenditures involved. The Secretariat alleged problems related to the short mandates prior to the adoption of resolution 49/233 A of 23 December 1994. The Committee can understand the overbudgeting for the rental of premises, maintenance supplies and utilities in relation to the first period, from 17 June to 16 December 1995, as indicated in annex II, paragraphs 15, 16 and 18 (A/51/784). However, the overbudgeting in exactly the same budget lines in the following performance report, for the period from 16 December 1995 to 30 June 1996 (see A/51/784/Add.1, annex II, paras. 17, 18 and 20) illustrate the need to refine and sharpen UNMOT planning, budgeting and reporting techniques and in particular to have performance reports published on a more timely basis than that of 24 January 1997 (A/51/784), which appeared some 13 months after the end of the period in question.

14. In this connection, the Advisory Committee also notes the underexpenditure of $56,000 for rations for the period from 17 June 1995 to 30 June 1996 covered by the two performance reports. The Committee was further informed that, as a precautionary measure, team sites had been requested to stockpile rations in the event of a deterioration in the security situation. Since the latter did not occur, stocks were reduced and no purchases were required during either budget period.

15. Likewise, the Advisory Committee notes an overexpenditure amounting to $679,800 in relation to the use of fixed-wing aircraft for the entire period ending 30 June 1996, while the provisions made for the two periods amounted to $20,400 and $22,400 respectively, as explained in annex II, paragraph 25, and annex II, paragraphs 28 and 29, of the two reports. At the same time, the total amount of $1,928,200 apportioned for helicopter operations was never used during the duration of the two periods under review (see annex II, para. 24, and annex II, para. 27, respectively). While the Committee does not question the use of fixed-wing air services, as reported in the performance report for the period ending 15 December 1995, it is of the opinion that experience gained should have led UNMOT to request and justify resources for fixed-wing air services for the period after 16 December 1995.

16. The Committee sought additional clarification with regard to several carry-overs from prior periods, such as the $80,400 indicated in annex II, paragraph 29, of the second report, related to resupply flights from UNPF; the additional requirement of $39,400 representing the reimbursement to UNPF during the prior period for the freight of spare parts and supplies transferred from UNPF (para. 32); and the $6,800 under stationery and office supplies carried over from the prior period mentioned in annex II, paragraph 41, of the first report. The Committee was informed that these carry-overs had resulted from the non-obligation of funds during the mandate period, since the related costs had not been made available earlier because of long delays in processing inter-office vouchers. The Committee is not satisfied with the explanation and trusts that action will be taken to avoid any such recurrence in the future.

17. The Committee also noticed, in its examination of the two performance reports, that expenditures for which no provision had been made in the cost estimates were incurred for several items through the transfer of resources within the authorized budget. Such is the case for item 10, supplies and services, where additional requirements of $24,700 are indicated under uniform items, flags and decals (see annex II, para. 45, of the first report); and item 16, air and surface freight, where a total of $10,500 was required to cover the cost of shipment of communications equipment from Brindisi and Liberia (see para. 50).

18. The second report contains similar examples: an additional requirement of $12,000 under travel costs for a trip undertaken by Headquarters personnel to UNMOT for the inter-Tajik talks; an additional requirement of $5,500 for the reimbursement of the depreciation factor for medical equipment provided by the Government of Switzerland under the letter of assist (see para. 30 below); and additional requirements of $5,900 under miscellaneous other services and $800 under quartermaster and general stores.

19. As regards death and disability compensation, the Advisory Committee sought additional information from the Secretariat to that contained in the two performance reports. A claim in the amount of $72,146 relating to the death of one military observer on 18 September 1995 has been presented. As indicated in annex I of the second report, an overexpenditure of $51,100 was incurred during the period from 16 December 1995 to 30 June 1996 in this connection. The Secretariat informed the Committee that the rest had been processed through the prior provisions. In addition, the

Committee was informed that a military observer had been injured in a car accident during the month of July 1995 and one local staff member killed in a car accident in November 1996. Claims related to the two cases have been received but are yet to be settled.

20. Paragraph 9 of the Secretary-General's first report and paragraph 8 of the second indicate that the action to be taken by the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-first session in connection with the financing of UNMOT is a decision to set off against the future assessment on Member States their respective share in the unencumbered balances of $1,548,000 gross ($1,402,800 net) for the period from 17 June to 15 December 1995 and $1,312,200 gross ($1,260,800 net) for the period from 16 December 1995 to 30 June 1996. The Advisory Committee concurs with those proposals.

Proposed budget for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998

21. In its resolution 50/238 of 7 June 1996, the General Assembly appropriated $7,478,900 gross ($6,971,600 net) for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, inclusive of $176,400 for the support account for peacekeeping operations, to be assessed at a monthly rate of $623,242 gross ($580,967 net), subject to the extension of the mandate of UNMOT by the Security Council.

22. The cost estimates submitted by the Secretary-General in his report of 12 February 1997 (A/51/784/Add.2) amount to $7,967,700 gross ($7,413,300 net) for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. This estimate reflects an increase of $665,200 in gross terms — or 9.1 per cent — when compared with the previous 12-month period, as a result of additional requirements in relation to civilian personnel, transport operations and air operations. On a monthly basis, the assessment of $663,975 gross ($617,775 net) is 6 per cent higher in gross terms than that for the previous period.

23. The cost estimates provide for requirements for 44 military observers and 66 international and local staff (26 international and 40 local), an increase from the current 59 (24 international and 35 local staff). They also include requirements for the proposed increase in the number of team sites from 9 to 11. The Committee requested an explanation of the operational rationale for the increase in sites, but this was not received.

24. The cost estimates were prepared in the light of the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council of 5 December 1996 and 21 January 1997 (S/1996/1010 and S/1997/56) and the meetings that took place in Moscow in December and in Tehran in January, which resulted in the signing of an agreement on the restoration of the ceasefire, a protocol defining the functions and powers of the Commission on National Reconciliation and a protocol on refugees, thus giving new impetus to the efforts aimed at achieving national reconciliation. The progress in the inter-Tajik talks was welcomed by the Security Council in a statement made by its President on 7 February 1997 (S/PRST/1997/6).

25. During its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee was briefed further by a representative of the Secretary-General, who informed the Committee about the latest events. The activity of armed groups, not under any effective control from the Government or the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), still constitutes a serious obstacle, rendering the operations of UNMOT virtually impossible. The deterioration in the security situation and the recent hostage taking of UNMOT personnel led to the virtual halt of the work of other agencies involved in the area and the relocation of most UNMOT staff from all team sites to Uzbekistan — only six military observers and seven international staff remained in Dushanbe at the time. However, the Committee was informed that the situation remained very fluid and that constant monitoring and reassessment of it were being undertaken in view of the recent release of the hostages, the talks held in Moscow from 26 February to 8 March 1997 and those to resume on 9 April in Tehran.

26. The Committee believes that the outcome of the present crisis may have an impact on the current period and change the implementation of the cost estimates submitted in the report of the Secretary-General. This being the case, a revision would have to be made and any changes would have to be reflected in the relevant performance report.

27. Of the total cost estimates contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/784/Add.2), 44 per cent are based on standard costs and ratios, while the remaining 56 per cent cover mission-specific requirements; non-recurrent costs amount to $266,500 and recurrent costs amount to $7,701,200 gross.

28. As indicated in paragraph 12 of the same report, a number of programmes and organizations of the United Nations system, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), are actively involved in humanitarian and other assistance

activities in Tajikistan. The Advisory Committee sought additional information on any co-location or cost-sharing arrangements, but only received confirmation that some of the agencies worked together with UNMOT on the transportation of equipment within the mission area, and to and from Uzbekistan, thus lowering the cost of transportation. The Committee remains concerned with regard to the lack of cooperation among these entities in sharing facilities, such as transport (other than equipment), communications and premises, which results in unnecessary expenditures from assessed and voluntary funds.

29. The estimate of $1,571,400 for military personnel costs provides for a full component of 44 military observers. The amount includes payment of mission subsistence allowance at the rates reviewed in February 1996, as indicated in annex II.A of the report, and one rotation trip per observer. As regards the provision for rations, the Committee notes the increase made from 30 to 60 days of contingency rations for 44 military observers and 26 international staff indicated in paragraph 2 of annex II.C.

30. A $5,500 provision is indicated for contingent-owned equipment. In this regard, the Committee was informed that the Government of Switzerland had provided 32 items of medical equipment valued at $83,091.70, which the United Nations would otherwise have had to procure at a higher cost. Under the established agreement, the United Nations, under the terms of a letter of assist, will reimburse 6.7 per cent of the value of the equipment per annum ($5,500). Furthermore, this arrangement, effective since December 1995, was previously disclosed under the budget line item entitled other equipment, specifically, medical and dental equipment.

31. A provision for $3,749,800 is included for civilian personnel costs in relation to 26 international staff and 40 Local level posts, representing an increase of 7 posts in the staffing component, as indicated in paragraph 23 above and explained in paragraph 23 of the report of the Secretary-General. Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that, as at 18 February 1997, 12 of the 13 authorized Professional posts were filled, the 2 authorized General Service posts were encumbered, as were the 9 authorized Field Service posts and 34 of the 35 authorized Local posts. The provision indicated therefore supposes full incumbency, which could be affected in view of current developments.

32. The Advisory Committee also notes, as indicated in paragraph 4 above, that the Government of Germany made a voluntary cash contribution, reported since 1995, of $717,463, intended to fund the cost of UNMOT helicopter operations. The amount was to be used by December 1995, but it has not been used to date, since there were no helicopter operations (see para. 15 above). In that connection, the Committee notes the absence of information on miscellaneous income, such as interest on voluntary contributions. The Advisory Committee requests that future reports contain such information.

33. Furthermore, the Committee notes that the estimate under air operations indicates a provision for $675,000 and, as explained in paragraph 18 of annex II.C of the report of the Secretary-General, negotiations are under way for the hiring of one helicopter. In view of previous experience evident in the two most recent performance reports, the Committee recommends that the Secretary General request the donor to authorize the use of its cash contribution during the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998, should a helicopter become available. If it were acceptable to the donor, in accordance with the treatment of voluntary contributions, set out in General Assembly resolution 44/192 B, the said amount would be set off against the future assessment on Member States for the financing of UNMOT.

34. Paragraph 7 of annex II.C includes travel by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and his support staff to neighbouring countries for inter-Tajik talks and consultations. No mission subsistence allowance is requested. Yet paragraph 19 of the same annex, dealing with fixed-wing aircraft, provides for the charter cost of flights to be made by the Special Representative and government officials for inter-Tajik talks. The Committee was informed that the Mission sometimes provided support to government officials. In such cases and when the Special Representative was travelling with staff it proved cost-effective to charter, whereas when he was travelling alone commercial flights were used. The Advisory Committee requests that the Mission ensure proper planning and coordination in order to economize on travel costs.

35. An amount of $80,000 is estimated for one resupply flight for the transport of a variety of equipment from Brindisi to Dushanbe, since, as indicated in paragraph 19 of annex II.C, there is no other reliable and cost-effective alternative for the purpose. The Committee sought additional clarification to ensure the non-duplication of freight costs under several items and the cost-effectiveness of the provision for the flight. Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that those items included communications equipment, office furniture and generators, and that accordingly the total of $8,200 estimated for freight under those respective items would no longer be required. The cost estimates could therefore be reduced by that amount; the Committee recommends that the savings be reflected in the performance report.

36. The Committee notes the provision for $11,000 under public information programmes, indicated in paragraph 42 of the same annex, for the local production of posters and newspaper supplements. The Committee was informed, upon inquiry, that since the official media reached a very low percentage of the population — mostly in the capital — the provision was intended to provide and disseminate information in the countryside, through the field stations, regarding the Mission's mandate and activities, updates on the political negotiations, ceasefire verification procedures, activities of the Joint Commission on the monitoring of the ceasefire agreement and press releases.

37. Paragraph 25 of the report outlines the action to be taken by the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-first session in connection with the financing of UNMOT. The Advisory Committee recommends that the Assembly appropriate the amount of $7,967,700 gross ($7,413,300 net) for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998, to be assessed at the monthly rate of $663,975 gross ($617,775 net), subject to the extension of the mandate of UNMOT by the Security Council.